

## Meyer Ranch Park Historical Background

As modern vehicles travel between the metro area and Conifer on Highway 285 past Windy Point down a long and winding road, between forested hillsides a valley opens before them with refreshing vistas of meadow and wetlands. Meyer Ranch Park beckons to the weary traveler now as the valley has welcomed travelers for centuries.

For over 10,000 years, hunter-gatherers migrated through the Front Range area, wintering in the Hogback Valley of southeastern Jefferson County. From 12,000 to 7,000 years ago, Paleoindians followed wildlife and ripening vegetation from the plains to progressively higher elevations as far away as South, Middle and North Parks, and then wintered at South Valley and similar lower elevation sites before beginning their annual cycle again. South Valley's red sandstone cliffs and boulders face southwest; the dark rocks absorb heat from the sun during the day, with the heat being released at night. Paleoindians probably leaned poles against the rocks and put brush or hides over them for shelter. From 7,000 to about 2,000 years ago, semi-nomadic Archaic Indians settled in camps along the foothills, occupying open ridges, valleys and shelters among rock outcrops. They chose locations offering a combination of a reliable water source, shelter, diversity of plant and animal resources, and unobstructed views. Small groups began to stay in one place long enough to construct shelters and cultivate plants.

From 2,000 to 200 years ago Plains Ceramic Stage Native Americans were the first to use pottery and the bow and arrow. These Native Americans developed cultural ties to indigenous people of the plains and the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. The Foothills region provided hunting grounds for multiple tribes, and the Hogback Valley areas continued to be used for winter camps and seasonal meeting grounds.

With the arrival of spring these Native Americans moved into the foothills, and South Turkey Creek Canyon was one of the nearby areas that offered the resources they sought. A year-round spring northwest of the original homesteader's cabin is called Indian Spring because of the large number of arrowheads found nearby.

As miners seeking gold and silver arrived in the region they also traveled up South Turkey Creek Canyon. The route became so heavily traveled that a toll road, the South Turkey Creek Wagon Road, was constructed.

Duncan McIntyre brought his family from Canada and settled near the South Turkey Creek wagon road in the early 1860s. They gradually filed four homesteads and built a fine hay ranch. Each night they fed and lodged 10-15 weary travelers. In 1883 Louis Ramboz bought 480 acres from McIntyre, and ran a successful timber, hay and cattle business. Ramboz had a new ranch house built in 1889. Located halfway between Denver and Fairplay, "Midway House" also served as a hotel. Ralph Kirkpatrick bought the ranch in 1912 and ran a working ranch until the 1940s. Horses pulled skiers up the southern hillside for skiing in the early 1940s.

In 1950 Norman Meyer bought the ranch, and, in 1959, bought McIntyre's original homestead. Legend claimed the ranch once provided winter quarters for P.T. Barnum Circus' animals; it was confirmed in 1955, when the Meyers remodeled Midway House and found a board inscribed: "Circus Town 1889." The park is named for Norman and Ethyl Meyer, who continue to reside adjacent to the park.

Jefferson County Open Space acquired the land in 1986 and opened the park to the public in 1989. In February of 2002, Open Space purchased Legault Summit, a 127-

acre parcel near the southeast boundary of the park. It could be two years or more before this parcel becomes available to the general public.